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# The Fourfold Myth of Death and Rebirth in George MacDonald's *Phantastes*

James T. Williamson

I.

The critical history of *Phantastes* has circled in various capacities and through various phases around the question of the work's structure, as the critical history of its later sibling, *Lilith*, has tended to circle back to that work's "Endless Ending." That *Lilith* is a sufficiently rich imaginative work to generate and sustain a wide variety of approaches to its "riddle," if you will, is made amply evident in the essays collected in *Lilith in a New Light* (2008). While *Phantastes* has yet to generate a like volume, it has likewise generated a wide variety of approaches to its "riddle."

When I first wrote about *Phantastes* in my MA thesis in 1990, one of the major issues I found myself implicitly, then increasingly explicitly, addressing, was the oft-reiterated variation on what seemed almost conventional critical wisdom: *Phantastes* was a random, disorganized work, lacking structural cohesion. This, as it seemed to me, passively held view, no doubt had its inception in the baffled and often hostile responses of reviewers which greeted the book's publication in 1858. Yet, nearly a hundred years later, even an enthusiast like W.H. Auden would write that "there seems no particular reason, one feels, why Anodos should have just the number of adventures which he does have—they could be equally more or less..." (Auden vi). Descendants of this inherited view continued to be voiced in more rigorously critical contexts several decades later: in the 1970s C.N. Manlove wrote that "the whole book appears to have been created in a series of dislocated imaginative bursts" (75), Richard Reis that "the loose episodic plot of *Phantastes* is not really tied together very well . . ." (93); Reis's statement was maintained in the 1989 revised edition of his study, and William Raeper in 1987 asserted that "it is a novel without a plot" (145).

This view is, at least in its origins, not entirely difficult to account for. *Phantastes* is in many respects a formal amalgam, and a prose fiction which relies very little on the dramatic structural principles underlying what was the dominant form of prose fiction in English in 1858, the novel: it shares, in Anodos' wandering journey, some elements with the picaresque, but the fluid,

shapeshifting, landscape of Fairy Land is the virtual antithesis of the worlds of Fielding or Smollet. While filled with fairy tale elements, it is clearly not for children, and does not follow the sharply defined, linear progression of the conventional fairy tale. Clearly a metaphysical fiction, and cast in the mode of the dream vision, it invites some comparison with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but it is entirely lacking the explicit allegorical framework which determines meaning in Bunyan's work, and in fact makes no overt mention of Christianity anywhere in its pages. That *Phantastes* generated the critical reaction it did is scarcely surprising.

That the view continued largely unquestioned through the 1980s no doubt reflects similar issues, and it is not amiss to affirm that *Phantastes* is an intricate, multi-layered work which does not conform easily to the critical apparatus of our various recognized contemporary genres.<sup>1</sup> The absence of a clearly defined dramatic focus, and an organization which in fact operates more on a poetic than a novelistic level, has tended to render the book more opaque to critics than the later *Lilith*, which shares much with its earlier sibling but does carry a more integrated dramatic structure.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it seems to me that insufficiently attentive reading was a contributing factor to the view. The surface content of *Phantastes* has been subject to noteworthy misrepresentation, and if a critical discussion carries inaccuracies on a simple superficial level, a perception of confusion is far more likely to emerge.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly a quarter of a century on, however, the issue as a point of contention in itself can probably be safely dismissed. Shortly before my writing in 1990, though I was unaware of it at the time, John Docherty's "A Note on the Structure and Conclusion of *Phantastes*" (1988) appeared, briefly outlining some ideas on what might be termed the skeletal structure of the work, how it is organized in terms of linear narrative motion. Both Roderick McGillis's "The Community of the Centre: Structure and Theme in *Phantastes*" (1992) and Adrian Gunther's "The Structure of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*" (1993) provide more involved development of structural ideas predicated on the idea of the center, and stress the significance of the story of Cosmo to the understanding of the work. In what may be the most involved and illuminating essays, Fernando Soto has explored, in "Chthonic Aspects of MacDonald's *Phantastes*: From the Rising of the Goddess to the *Anodos* of Anodos" (2000), MacDonald's adaptation of elements derived from Greek antiquity, specifically mythic patterns of the death and rebirth of the goddess; and, in "Mirrors in MacDonald's *Phantastes*: A Reflexive Structure" (2004), the intricately thorough and

detailed way in which mirrors and the reflexive permeate the images and language of *Phantastes*. Counters to the charges of lack of organizational and structural cohesion were sufficient by at least a decade ago that Nick Page's statement in the introduction to his excellent annotated edition of *Phantastes* (2008), that "*Phantastes* is very carefully structured . . ." (15), could probably have stood even without the elaboration he provides.

Of course, the discussions have not necessarily been uniform, and each writer has had, to varying degrees, and with overlap, different ideas on precisely what the structural principles are, or wherein the unity of the text lies. But this is, perhaps, as it should be. It is certainly in keeping with MacDonald's notion that "a genuine work of art must mean many things; the truer its art, the more things it will mean," and that these many meanings are contingent on the "nature and development" of readers ("Fantastic" 316-7). In a broader context, such variances attend critical responses to the works of far more widely read "canonical" writers, from Shakespeare to Milton to Wordsworth to Dickens. That *Phantastes* has generated varied responses in the comparatively meager pool of critical commentary attached to it, is perhaps testament to its richness.<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, this does not mean that some critical readings may not be more persuasive than others. The critical view that *Phantastes* lacks organizational and structural cohesion I think now can safely be dismissed as demonstrably untrue. The thorough-going, doctrinaire Freudian basis of the first critical book on MacDonald, Robert Lee Wolff's *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (1961), does not appear to persuade many more recent critics on MacDonald.<sup>5</sup> And while the "nature and development" of readers is an intrinsic factor in discovering meaning in any literary work, this does not mean that what might be gleaned of authorial intent, or knowledge of what an author may have brought to the table in terms of reading and influences, are irrelevant. Though MacDonald was virtually absolute in his refusal to "explain" his work to readers clamoring for its "meaning," and instead suggested that "your meaning may be superior to mine" ("Fantastic" 317)<sup>6</sup>, his intentions, while not rigidly articulated and imposed, are yet not entirely opaque, and, in the case of *Phantastes*, a large slice of what he brought to the table in terms of reading and influences is supplied in the chapter headings. These are certainly important to a reader trying to find meaning in MacDonald's work.

Nevertheless, I continue to believe, that some sense of the structure and meaning of *Phantastes* inheres in the text intrinsically, without necessary

immediate reference to either MacDonald's reading and influences, or to a pre-formulated articulation of his apparent intentions. In the first instance, MacDonald's reading was vast, and his application of it to his own writing was quite involved and quite sophisticated. He drew from a wide range of sources in a wide range of capacities, but all of it was thoroughly sublimated to his own vision and intentions. I will return to this, but in the following two sections I will look at the text of *Phantastes* largely in isolation, with minimal recourse to work by other writers, and then in the capacity of parallel rather than "influence."

In the second instance, I believe that something of MacDonald's intentions in fact emerge most clearly from the text itself, and a pre-formulated articulation is perhaps inappropriate.<sup>7</sup> Unlike *Pilgrim's Progress*, as I have noted, *Phantastes* is not, strictly speaking, an allegory, though there are resemblances between the two works—significantly, the Dream Vision machinery, and the use of fantastic adventure as a way to explore spiritual development—, and MacDonald greatly admired Bunyan's work. *Phantastes* operates on a level which is *suggestive* rather than *prescriptive*, the older Dream Vision elements having passed through the lens of Romanticism, both English and German, arriving at an approach which is more symbolist than narrowly allegorical. Both *Phantastes* and the later *Lilith* more closely approximate William Blake's notion of the visionary, as distinct from the allegorical.<sup>8</sup>

The textual analysis which follows I have divided into two parts, which I have termed the "horizontal" and the "vertical." The first is concerned, as was John Docherty's essay, with the skeletal structure of the work, and how it is patterned in terms of linear narrative motion. However, where Docherty suggests a breakdown into three sections, I see four as more appropriate, and see natural breaks between the sections in different places than he does. The "horizontal" I designate as comprising four "cycles," each embodying a pattern of death and re-birth, accompanied by events and imagery which repeat and develop in a reflexive fashion. This "myth," as I have called it, suggests something of the significance Fernando Soto develops at some length in "Chthonic aspects of MacDonald's *Phantastes*."

The second, the "vertical," refers to four layers running through the narrative, one represented by Anodos, the protagonist and perceptual center, the other three by the Knight, the Marble Lady, and the Shadow, which may each be seen as externalizations reflecting aspects of Anodos' inner nature. My contention here is that the presence or absence of the latter three, is

arranged virtually diagrammatically through the four cycles, and the nature of and circumstances attending that presence or absence directly reflects the development of Anodos.

Together, the two form what I have called the “Fourfold Myth of Death and Rebirth.”

## II.

In this section I will sketch an organizing pattern of *Phantastes* on the horizontal level of the book, that is: in terms of surface narrative motion. *Phantastes* is built on a series of four cycles. Each cycle begins with a figurative birth out of a kind of chaos, evidenced in a confused or indefinite sense of time and/or place, accompanied in the early stages by water, or, in the last cycle, the image of water. Each cycle ends with a figurative death (actual in the context of Fairy Land with the last cycle), which leads directly into the next cycle. The culmination of each resides in a kind of test and hence represents a stage in Anodos’s progress, a step in his education. In accordance with MacDonald’s theory that a “genuine work of art must mean many things,” this education can be construed in a number of ways: it can be seen as a rite of passage and coming of age, particularly in light of the correspondence of Anodos’s age (21) and the length of his stay in Fairyland (21 days); ending as it does with Anodos’s death within Fairy Land, it can also represent the passage of the entire life cycle; Rolland Hein sees the goal as the loss of self, in his book *The Harmony Within*. Any of these are possible, none of necessity preclude the others, and MacDonald was no doubt aware of all three. More might be formulated.

The first cycle begins with Anodos’s awakening into Fairy Land, and ends with the appearance of his Shadow at the end of Chapter VIII. To perhaps oversimplify, it is his passage through innocence and fall into self-consciousness. The second cycle begins with the confused roving of Chapter IX which ultimately leads him to the Fairy Palace, and ends with his ejection from the Palace at the end of Chapter XVI. This represents his passage through self-conscious reflection to a possessive eroticism, resulting in the death signified by his departure and effective banishment from the Palace. The third cycle begins with Anodos’s travels underground in Chapter XVII, passes through the episode with the old woman in the cottage with four doors, the battle with the giants, and ends in his imprisonment in the tower by his Shadow in Chapter XXII. Here Anodos rises to action, but then falls when he gives himself up to self-infatuation as a result of having acted.

The last cycle begins in the tower and continues to the end of the book. Here Anodos surmounts the previous defeats which stemmed from unreflective selfishness, possessiveness, and self-infatuation. Where the deaths that ended the previous three cycles all constituted falls, the death in the final cycle is, rather, epiphanic. The final chapter serves as a kind of coda: it embodies the indefiniteness of the chapters which begin each cycle, and returns to the human world which Anodos left after the opening chapter, hence suggesting a cyclic structure for the book as a whole.

### *The First Cycle*

The first chapter takes place in the present world, though its presentation, in terms of both physical place and time, is not as solid as that might lead us to expect.

The chief setting, the study of Anodos's dead father, is described mainly in terms of the immaterial:

But, as if the darkness had been too long an inmate to be easily expelled, and had dyed with blackness the walls to which, bat-like, it had clung, these tapers served but ill to light up the gloomy hangings, and seemed to throw yet darker shadows into the hollows of the deep-wrought cornice. All the further portions of the room lay shrouded in a mystery whose deepest folds were gathered around the dark oak cabinet which I now approached . . . (2)

Almost quintessentially gothic, it is the darkness, blackness, shadows, and mystery that characterize the room, and the only palpable, physical object in evidence is the cabinet.

Time is neither clear nor linear: the present is not Anodos in his dead father's study, but Anodos lying in bed reflecting on having been there the previous day, as he "awoke . . . with the usual perplexity of mind which accompanies the return of consciousness" (1). As the chapter proceeds, we easily forget this present until we are called back to it in the last paragraph: "All this I recalled as I lay with half-closed eyes" (8). In this return, the cyclic nature of the entire book is suggested.

Further, the scene in the study itself is built on references to the past. As Anodos approaches the cabinet, he reflects:

Perhaps, like a geologist, I was about to turn up to the light some of the buried strata of the human world, with its fossil remains charred by passion and petrified by tears. Perhaps I was to learn how my father, whose personal history was unknown to me, had woven his

web of story . . . Perhaps I was only to find the records of lands and moneys . . . coming down from strange men, and through troublous times, to me who knew little or nothing of them all . . . (2-3)

While the cabinet is the only tangible, physical object in the room given any attention, its primary function is to call up the past. And it is not even a definite past, but a speculative past, qualified three times in sequence by “perhaps.” The present object heightens, rather than relieves, the gothic atmosphere, pervaded by indefiniteness, shadows, and “the dead . . . drawing near” (3).

Out of the cabinet comes Anodos’s 237 year-old great-grandmother, supernatural yet far more clear and solid than the rest of the setting: “A tiny woman-form, as perfect in shape as if she had been a small Greek statuette roused to life and motion. Her dress was of a kind that could never grow old-fashioned because it was simply natural: a robe plaited in a band around the neck, and confined by a belt around the waist, descended to her feet” (4).

The conversation which proceeds, following from the gothic character of the room itself, may be seen to embody a kind of death, in the sense that some of Anodos’s basic assumptions about the world, about reality, are deflated. This reaches its culmination in his great-grandmother’s agreeing to grant his wish, expressed to his sister the previous evening, to visit Fairy Land, disregarding his glib assertion: “I meant something quite different from what you seem to think” (7). Even forgetting the fact that she is Anodos’s great-grandmother, the woman embodies something of a mother-figure, the conduit through which Anodos is born into Fairy Land.

Just before she disappears, Anodos looks into her eyes: “They filled me with an unknown longing. I remembered somehow that my mother had died when I was a baby. I looked deeper and deeper, till they spread around me like seas, and I sank in their waters” (7).

The fluid, dream-like transformation of Anodos’s bedroom into the forest of Fairy Land in the next chapter, and his emergence into it following a stream, is a clear figure of emergence from the womb, of birth into a new existence. Anodos’s relation to his new environment is suitably child-like. He expresses no surprise at the sudden transformation of his bedroom, and for the better part of this cycle he is fundamentally an innocent: his actions are impulsive and he does not reflect on them or their motivations; the direction of his wanderings is also guided primarily by impulse, and he rarely has more than a vague intuition about his own capacity to shape his course; things tend to happen *to* him.

The fairies and demons of this opening cycle are primarily external, and what they reflect of Anodos is more latent than actual—though the latency steadily grows and becomes actual at the end of the cycle. The fairies in the garden of the cottage between the four trees embody childishness. Nurturing benevolence is clearly consolidated in such a figure as the beech tree, and destructive malice in the ash tree, from whom the beech tree saves Anodos the first time. These figures have the power, in themselves, to help or destroy him: the Ash has the power to “bury you [Anodos] at the foot of his tree” (46), and the beech has the power to intervene: “I felt two large, soft arms thrown round me from behind; and a voice like a woman’s said: ‘Do not fear the goblin; he dares not hurt you now.’ With that, the [Ash’s] hand was suddenly withdrawn as from a fire, and disappeared in the darkness and the rain” (43).

The beech is a mother figure, consoling Anodos after his fright by what resembles a bogey from childish nightmares. When he goes on the following morning, it is not by chance that he goes on “as if new born” (50).

In this scene, while lying in the womb-like embrace of the beech-tree, Anodos describes a fourfold imagination, each part of which can be seen to correspond to one of the four cycles of the book:

At one time I felt as if I was wandering in childhood through sunny spring forests, over carpets of primroses, anemones, and little white starry things—I had almost said, creatures, and finding new wonderful flowers at every turn. At another, I lay half dreaming in the hot summer noon, with a book of old tales beside me, beneath a great beech; or, in autumn, grew sad because I trod on the leaves which had sheltered me, and received their last blessing in the sweet odours of decay; or, in a winter evening, frozen-still, looked up, as I went home to a warm fireside, through the netted boughs and twigs to the cold, snowy moon, with her opal zone about her. (48)

The vision of spring time clearly reflects the early part of the story, the images of flowers recalling Anodos’s encounter with the flower fairies in Chapters III and IV. I will come back to the successive summer, fall, and winter images as I come to the second, third, and last cycles. This does suggest that the course of the whole book is embedded in it from its opening chapters.

To return to Anodos, the consolidating of both nurturing and destructive forces in figures external to him, is very much a reflection of his unreflective and innocent state. He does not think things through, and though

he does have sporadic child-like inklings that he is not proceeding wisely, they are always vague, and impulse over-rides. When he leaves the stream at the end of Chapter II, he does so “without any good reason, and with a vague feeling that I ought to have followed its course” (12). When he leaves the beech-tree at the beginning of Chapter V, it is “with a vague compunction, as if I ought not to have left her” (51). Even when he receives a warning, it is apt to be disregarded with childish bravado. When he decides to leave the cottage between the four trees just at dusk, his hostess says:

“It might be better to stay all night, than risk the dangers of the forest then. Where are you going?”

“Nay, that I do not know,” I replied; “but I wish to see all that is to be seen, and therefore I should like to start just at sundown.”

“You are a bold youth, if you have any idea of what you are daring; but a rash one if you know nothing about it; and, excuse me, you do not seem very well informed about the country or its manners.” (20)

Neither vague intuitions or warnings affect Anodos’s impulses.

However, as the first cycle proceeds Anodos comes closer and closer to self-consciousness. What I have called his innocence also carries within it the seeds of an unreflective selfishness. This is evident in his departure from the beech-tree, and then later in Chapter V when Anodos acts upon what he encounters for the first time in the book by singing the Marble Lady in the grotto into life. But this is still something that, to a significant degree, just happens: Anodos does not meditate singing, but the idea of song, and when he does sing it is “ere I was aware” (58). When the lady awakes, she flits out of the grotto and away, and Anodos pursues her. She becomes the first specific goal that Anodos consciously pursues, and the selfish motivation behind the goal is evident in his narratorial exclamation, “found, freed, lost!” (61).

But his selfish desire for the Marble Lady, combined with his unreflective innocence, renders him unable to recognize an imposter. Despite various warnings about the Alder maid, the last from the Knight who Anodos first meets directly after the Marble Lady is awakened, he is so single-mindedly pre-occupied with thoughts of the Marble Lady, that he refuses to consider the possibility that this might not be she. First he exclaims: “It is *my* white lady!” (70, *my* italics); and, second, he disregards his own intuition, now less vague than on earlier occasions: “Yet, if I would have confessed it, there was something . . . that did not vibrate harmoniously with the beat of

my inward music” (70). That he does proceed suggests a growing capacity for self indulgence and willing self-deception. He accompanies the Alder Maid to her cave, where he gives himself up to a tale she tells, which “at every turn and pause, somehow or other fixed my eyes and thoughts upon her extreme beauty” (74), and hence on the idea of his being with her: “The odours that crept through the silence from the sleeping woods were the only signs of an outer world that invaded our solitude” (74). The notion of solitude here conveys a sense of Anodos’s burgeoning consciousness of himself as something apart from other things.

This unreflective self indulgence also nearly leads to Anodos’s destruction: the Alder maid, after lulling him to sleep and despoiling him of the beech-tree’s protective girdle of leaves, attempts to deliver him into the hands of the Ash once again. It is only a seemingly chance attack (by, as we later discover, the Knight) on the Ash’s tree that draws the spirit of the tree away from Anodos, just as “I had given myself up to a death of unfathomable horror” (75).

After this adventure, Anodos begins to detach himself from his environment. Where the nuts and fruit of Fairy Land had brought Anodos “into a far more complete relationship with the things around me” (52) after his departure from the beech-tree, enabling him to understand the languages of birds and beasts, now: “The birds were singing; but not for me. All the creatures spoke a language of their own, with which I had nothing to do . . .” (78). He stays with a family the night after the adventure of the Alder maid, and when his commonsensical host asks him—“I dare say you saw nothing worse than yourself there?”—his thought, “I hope I did” (84), indicates a growing division within Anodos, an unsureness of, not so much what is external to him, but what is internal. The encounter with the Alder maid is the test in the first cycle, which Anodos fails partly through ignorance, partly through selfishness.

This failure leads directly to his figurative death at the end of the first cycle: a fall into bitter self-consciousness, and a divided nature, consolidated in the acquisition of his Shadow in Chapter VIII. Here, Anodos seems once again to be acted upon. Warned against the house of the Ogress by his hostess of the previous night, he is deliberately led to it in ignorance by the ill-natured son. Still, his intuition warns him: “A vague misgiving crossed my mind when I saw it [the Ogress’s cottage]; but I must needs go closer . . .”, and “An irresistible attraction caused me to enter” (92-3). Once entered the cottage, he is warned by the Ogress herself not to look into the closet he sees:

“Still the irresistible desire which made me enter the building, urged me: I must open that door . . . ,” and “The prohibition only increased my desire to see” (94).

It is out of the closet that the Shadow comes. Anodos asks what it is, and the answer given by the Ogress refers directly back to the Alder Maid: “It is only your shadow that has found you . . . Everybody’s shadow is ranging up and down looking for him . . . your’s has found you, as every person’s is almost sure to do who looks into that closet, especially after meeting one in the forest, whom I dare say you have met” (97).

Here what I have called the first cycle of *Phantastes* ends: Anodos has come to the end of innocence, and fallen into a divided existence, as the headnote for Chapter VIII, from a speech of Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust Part One*, suggests: “*Ich bin ein Theil des Theils, der anfangs alles war*/ I am a part of the part, which at first was the whole” (92).

### ***The Second Cycle***

In Chapter IX, as in Chapter I, time and place are confused. At the very beginning of the chapter, Anodos says: “From this time, until I arrived at the palace of Fairy Land, I can attempt no consecutive account of my wanderings and adventures” (99).<sup>9</sup> The chapter comes across as a series of snapshots without any intrinsic order to them. And while the direction throughout the opening chapters in Fairy Land was always very clearly east, in Chapter IX there is no indication of a direction at all.

No doubt some of the adventures in this chapter are those which Richard Reis suggests were included “for the sake of mere excitement” (93). However, the rather confused nature of the chapter suggests its gestative function: it is the soil out of which the second cycle grows. Anodos is now occupied with inner reflection: “Everything, henceforward, existed for me in its relation to my attendant” (99). The confusion of outward time and space reflects this inner preoccupation.

Further, the randomness of the chapter lies primarily in its presentation: the actual matter pre-figures much that happens subsequently in the second cycle, occasionally echoes what happened in the first, and serves as a bridge between the two. The Knight appears once more, this time only to be banished by the Shadow: just as Anodos is about to confide in him his adventure with the Alder maid, “round slid the shadow and inwrapt my friend; and I could not trust him . . . The next morning we parted” (103). The knight does not return until the fourth cycle. The distrust may be said

to reflect Anodos's inability to fully believe in his own better motives, and capacity for sinking into worldly-wise cynicism: "I began to be rather vain of my attendant, saying to myself; 'In a land like this, with so many illusions everywhere, I need his aid to disenchant the things around me. He does away with all appearances., and shows me things in their true colour and form. And I am not one to be fooled by the vanities of the common crowd. I will not see beauty where there is none. I will dare to behold things as they really are'" (103).

The devastating effects of the Shadow detailed here foreshadow the barren landscape he is banished to at the end of the cycle.

The two female figures in this chapter are primarily erotic rather than maternal: the second of the two, who provokes Anodos into an attempt to kiss her, and whose "countenance became, of a sudden, absurdly hideous" (108) when he drew close to her, perhaps echoes the Alder maid, though in comic fashion. The implicit invocation of mirrors, when Anodos likens her transformation to "the distortion produced in your countenance when you look at it as reflected in a concave or convex surface" (107), looks forward to a figure which repeats throughout the cycle, and is at the heart of the inset story of Cosmo. The first, the maiden with the globe, Anodos figuratively rapes: after "the shadow glided round and inwrapt the maiden" (106), he forcibly maintains hold of her globe until it bursts: this certainly pre-figures Anodos's violation of the Marble Lady at the end of the cycle, the test which he fails, and which leads to the death suggested by his ejection from the Fairy Palace.

By itself, the chapter may seem rather random and indefinite. But, taken in context, this can be seen as the indefiniteness of potentiality: it is the womb out of which the second cycle emerges, and the concerns of the second cycle are embodied in it.

As in the first cycle, Anodos emerges out of the indefinite following a stream in Chapter X. The implicit reference to Chapter II accentuates the suggestion of birth: "I felt as if I were entering Fairy Land for the first time..." (112). A bit later, Anodos rises "as from the death that wipes out of the sadness of life, and then dies itself in the new morrow" (113).

But the new, reflective, divided quality of Anodos's consciousness is also evident: the environment is not now merely accepted, as it is in the first cycle; rather, it is consciously observed, and elicits strong internal, emotional reactions: "As I sat, a gush of joy sprang forth in my heart, and overflowed at my eyes" (112). The environment is also shot through with an unmistakable

eroticism, evident in the first cycle only during Anodos's encounter with the Alder maid:

I felt as if . . . some loving hand were waiting to cool my forehead, and a loving word to warm my heart. Roses, wild roses, everywhere! So plentiful were they, they not only perfumed the air, they seemed to dye it a faint rose-hue. The colour floated abroad with the scent, and clomb, and spread, until the whole west blushed and glowed. . . . Could I but see the Spirit of the Earth, as I once saw the indwelling woman of the Beech-tree, and my beauty of the pale marble, I should be content. Content!—Oh, how gladly would I die of the light of her eyes! (112-3)

The stream becomes a river, in which Anodos observes the reflection of the moon, which leads to a passage of ruminations on the phenomena of reflections (see pages 114-5).

How the elements of reflective emotion and eroticism interact with Anodos's new self-consciousness is the substance of the second cycle. The main setting here is not the forest, but the Fairy Palace, which suggests both the intellect and imagination, and rather than constant travel, most of the second cycle is spent in one location. After an encounter with goblin fairies in the wasteland before he discovers the stream (paralleling the flower fairies of the first cycle), Anodos is effectively alone. His companions are books, which, read in the heat of the day, echoes the second, summer image that he sees while in the womb-like embrace of the beech-tree; invisible servants that provide him with food and drink in the Fairy Palace; and the dancers who only very indirectly acknowledge his presence. Spontaneity and impulse are not now his natural mode of being, but things which must be cultivated.

The Shadow's presence is mitigated during most of Anodos's stay at the palace, alternately dim or invisible, though it can surface in unexpected guise. Among the dancers discovered some time into his stay at the palace, he again finds the Marble Lady, once more "marble coldness and rigidity" (187), and not active with the other dancers. In keeping with the reflective nature of his consciousness in this cycle, he first discovers her in a dream, in which the end of the cycle is forecast: "While I gazed in speechless astonishment and admiration, a dark shadow, descending from above like the curtain of a stage, gradually hid her entirely from my view. I felt with a shudder that this shadow was perchance my missing demon . . ." (187).

Anodos discovers where in the palace she is located, but finds "a vacant pedestal" (187), on which he sees "the indistinct outlines of white

feet” (190). Remembering the events of Chapter V, he turns to song, and “Ever as I sang, the veil was uplifted . . . ” (200). Here, Anodos is faced with his second test, and fails: once the shadow has been removed, the Marble Lady is still a statue. But, rather than continuing to sing, “I sprang to her, and, in defiance of the law of the place, flung my arms around her . . . and lifted her from the pedestal to my heart” (201).

Again, as in the first cycle, Anodos has been warned concerning his test, both directly: the admonition “Touch not!” (184) is prominently displayed in the hall of the dancers; and indirectly: the story of Cosmo and the lady in the mirror (Chapter XIII), which Anodos read in the library of the palace, and whose “history was mine” (147), culminated in its hero being faced with a similar choice between possessive eroticism and granting freedom. Despite these warnings, Anodos, like Cosmo, fails: the Marble Lady flees, crying “Ah! you should have sung to me; you should have sung to me!” (203). Anodos follows her through a door marked, “No one enters here without leave of the Queen” (202-3), and finds himself on “a waste, windy hill. Great stones like tombstones stood all about me” (203). The setting, and Anodos’s descent into the underground world at the beginning of the next chapter, clearly figure death.

Here the second cycle ends: Anodos’s new self-consciousness breeds a destructive eroticism which he is unable to resist, and he is subject to another figurative death.

### *The Third Cycle*

Like the previous two, the third cycle begins in an indefinite, womb-like setting, though here it is the barren, rocky, unyielding, and directionless dark of the world underground. Time is unclear: “I had no means of measuring time; and when I looked back, there was such a discrepancy between the decisions of my imagination and my judgment, as to the length of time that had passed, that I was bewildered . . . ” (215-6).

As the beginning of the second cycle involved, in Anodos’s pleasure in the disenchanting capacities of his Shadow, an implicit rejection of the careless innocence that had helped bring about his fall at the end of the first cycle, so the beginning of the third cycle involves a rejection of the possessive eroticism that brought about his fall at the end of the second. As with the first two cycles, Anodos comes into contact with fairies, here “just as those described, in German histories and travels, as Kobolds” (206). When they taunt him with, “You shan’t have her; you shan’t have her; he! he! he!

She's for a better man; she's for a better man; how he'll kiss her! how he'll kiss her!," he responds, "Well, if he is a better man, let him have her" (209), and they relent.

After this rejection, Anodos eventually emerges from the underground through a narrow passage suggestive of the birth canal: "The roof sank lower and lower, until I was compelled, first to stoop, and then to creep on my hands and knees. I recalled terrible dreams of childhood . . . At length, on getting past an abrupt turn in the passage, through which I had to force myself, I saw . . . the long-forgotten daylight shining through a small opening . . ." (216).

The birth is followed by water, though this time it is not a stream but the sea. This introduces a third dimension in Anodos's awareness: the doubleness of reflective self-consciousness now has added to it the element of memory, and where his reflections in the second cycle were either intellectual and speculative, or shot through with an erotic preoccupation, now his reflections are more bound up with his past. Just before he emerges from the world underground, Anodos "looked back towards . . . a vision of what had gone by" (216). That "the white lady had receded into an unknown region" (216) suggests that some important parts of that past are being repressed, that he is running from them. This is strongly underscored by Anodos's suicidal casting of himself to the turbulent sea. Nevertheless, in an immediate sense, water proves a balm after barrenness as it did with the steam-become-river in the second cycle, and Anodos revives to a calmer sea, boarding a small passing boat. As he looks into the sea from the boat, "vaguely revealed beneath the wave, I floated above my whole Past. The fields of my childhood flitted by; the halls of my youthful labours . . ." (220). However, though he calls what he sees his "whole" past, it is somehow a "whole" past without the Marble Lady. Nevertheless, this new preoccupation with the past was figured in the third, autumn image that Anodos saw while in the embrace of the beech-tree.

The consciousness of the past also intimates a consciousness of future, and the third cycle turns away from solitary wandering and reflection *per se* (in different ways, the glue of the first two cycles respectively) to fully pre-meditated accomplishment and action. In the third cycle, Anodos works to a specific, defined end for the first time, and in collaboration with others for the first time.

But before Anodos acts with the two brothers to destroy the giants in Chapters XX and XXI, and after he comes to land following his sea voyage,

he stays for a time with an old woman in the cottage with four doors (which parallels the cottage in which he reads of Percival early in the first cycle). Here he meets with a more elaborate and bleaker figure of the fourfold vision he saw while in the embrace of the beech-tree. The greater complexity, as well as the bleaker character, of what he encounters when he goes through each of the doors, reflects the bleaker and more complex frame of mind he is now in.

The first door leads him to the past, to childhood, and hence into the first cycle, but now it is tragedy, not pastoral memories, which is evoked: he re-experiences the death of his brother by drowning, facilitated by an unreflective “childish dispute” which resulted in their not going “to sleep as usual, the one with his arm about the other” (238). The second door leads him to a vision of the Marble Lady, the focal point of the second cycle. She is the lover of the Knight now, whose comment concerning Anodos, that “There was something noble in him, but it was a nobleness of thought, and not of deed” (241), also suggests the fundamentally reflective nature of Anodos’s consciousness in the second cycle. The third door leads Anodos, ultimately, to the tomb, to futurity, running from his past. It is the door by which he finally leaves the cottage, and hence suggests the third cycle. The fourth door is the Door of the Timeless, from which he brings back no memories: it is a rather chilling inversion of the homecoming of the winter image with the beech tree, and also of the epiphanic fourth cycle. Once again, this fourfold pattern underscores the structure of the entire book.

As I have said, it is through the third door, the door suggestive of futurity, that Anodos leaves, and the woman parts from him with the forward-looking words: “Go, my son, and do something worth doing” (251). It echoes the episode with the beech-tree in two respects. First, the maternal nature of the beech-tree is re-figured in the maternal nature of the old woman: “I felt as if I was leaving my mother for the first time” (251). Second, the autumn image from the episode with the beech-tree refers to treading “on the leaves that had sheltered me” (48): it is the autumn door he is leaving through here, and he is leaving because his going through the Door of the Timeless has caused the waters to rise and they will soon cover the cottage—figuratively, he has trod “on the leaves that had sheltered me” once again.

In the following episode, Anodos joins the two brothers to defeat the three giants, though only he survives the ordeal. It is Anodos’s first outward, “heroic” act, and the first time he has worked in community with others. On the surface, it appears that he has been tested and this time succeeded.

However, the real test is in regard to what Anodos makes of his external triumph. Already we have seen what can be taken as an implicit flaw in his motivation: in the third cycle he is running from his past, perhaps most glaringly evinced in his casting himself headlong into the sea after emerging from underground. He is seeking to bury his past, to suppress it, rather than confront and process it. In other words, Anodos is, to a large extent, concerned not so much with “doing something worth doing,” as doing something that will help him forget past woes. The result is that he is once more thrown back on an absorbing passion, this time with himself:

I felt a wonderful elevation of spirits, and began to reflect on my past life, and especially on my combat with the giants, with such satisfaction, that I actually had to remind myself, that I had only killed one of them; and that, but for the brothers, I should never have had the idea of attacking them, not to mention the smallest power of standing to it. Still, I rejoiced, and counted myself among the glorious knights of old; having even the unspeakable presumption . . . to think of myself (will the world believe it?) as side by side with Sir Galahad! (278)

Of course, his recollections of his “past life” would presumably leave out details such as being taken in by the Alder maid and transgressing in the Hall of the Statues. But as soon as he has thought of himself as the equal of Galahad, Anodos is suddenly faced with his Shadow, which, having apparently disappeared a brief time earlier, has metamorphosed into a mirror image of himself, “only . . . larger and fiercer” (279). Anodos is speechless before his double, the self he was infatuated with, which leads him to, then orders him into, a tower in the midst of the woods.

With this figurative death, this closing up into the tomb, the third cycle ends: Anodos has acted, has done something which, in itself, is “something worth doing,” but it has only led to an overweening self admiration which has ultimately proved to be a prison.

#### ***The Fourth Cycle***

Like the others, the fourth and last cycle begins in the indefinite: during the day the tower seems quite solid, but at night “the walls of the tower seemed to vanish away like a mist” (281); an indiscriminate number of days and nights passes away.

Anodos’s emergence from the tower/tomb/womb at last, figures rebirth and resurrection very plainly. The birth is not accompanied by actual water, but images of water characterize the song which wakes him to the

realization that all he needs to do to escape his prison is to open the door: it “bathed me like a sea; inwrapt me like an odourous vapour; entered my soul like a long draught of clear spring water . . .” (283). It is interesting that, in reverse order, each image calls up associations with the first three cycles.

The singer is the maiden whose globe Anodos broke in Chapter IX. Following the theme of a selectively rejected past in the third cycle, Anodos does not immediately recognize her, to which she remarks: “Do you not know me? But you hurt me, and that, I suppose, makes it easy for a man to forget” (285). However, Anodos’s wronging her has turned to the better: she has grown from a state of private, pleasure seeking selfishness, and now, “wherever I go, my songs do good, and deliver people” (287). She also provides a symmetry to the plot: she appears first directly following Anodos’s acquisition of his Shadow, and once again appears directly following his loss of it.

Likewise, Anodos goes on to be a servant. His path converges with that of the Knight who warned him of the Alder maid, saved him from the Ash, and is now married to the Marble Lady, “the embodiment of what I would fain become” (304), and he becomes the Knight’s squire. In this fourth cycle, Anodos corrects the errors which caused his falls in the earlier cycles: he follows the Knight, not self-indulgent whims as he did in the first cycle; in serving the Knight he is also serving the Marble Lady, since she is married to him—he is not trying to gratify a possessive erotic impulse as he did in the second cycle; here, Anodos’s act is service, something conferred, not something hoarded up within him for the sake of building up an impressive self image, as in the third cycle.

This last is seen in the episode of the enclosure in Chapter XXIII. Here one might say Anodos uses his “nobility of thought”: an elaborate religious ceremony is in process, which the Knight responds to in positive terms: “How solemn it is! Surely they wait to hear the voice of a prophet. There is something good near!” (307). The more perceptive Anodos, however, “had an unaccountable conviction that here was something bad” (307). Angry that the Knight is being fooled, Anodos approaches the pedestal on which the idol is perched, wrenches it from its place, is attacked by a wolf-like creature which springs from the hole left, and is then killed by the angry mob of the devotees. The death, this time, is actual (in Fairy Land, at any rate—Anodos finally ends up back in the human world), but it is an epiphany rather than a fall:

The hot fever of life had gone by, and I breathed the clear mountain-

air of the land of Death... It was not that I had in any way ceased to be what I had been. The very fact that anything can die, implies the existence of something that cannot die . . . If my passions were dead, the souls of those passions, those essential mysteries of the spirit which had imbodyed themselves in the passions . . . yet lived, yet glowed, with a pure, undying fire. They rose above their vanishing earthly garments, and disclosed themselves angels of light. (314-5)

He pledges: "I will be among you with the love that healeth" (318).

But then, almost as if he is overstepping his bounds with such promises, "a pang and a terrible shudder went through me; a writhing as of death convulsed me; and I became conscious once again of a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life" (318). He is returned to, or re-born into, the human world, the fourth cycle ends, and the book comes full circle.

We can also see the fourth image from the beech-tree episode here: the moon is connected with dreams and Fairy Land, with the imagination; the moon is also feminine, and her "opal zone" can be seen to symbolize the birth canal, through which Anodos has passed beyond the winter of death, returning home both in the image, and at the end of the fourth cycle.

The foregoing, of course, demonstrates that, even on the level of plot, *Phantastes* is scarcely disorganized and random, and in fact possesses a remarkable cohesion, though that cohesion is more poetic than dramatic. The cyclic pattern of death and rebirth repeats itself four times, with each repetition built on reiterated images and motifs, echoes and reflections, building gradually and quite pointedly to the reversal and epiphany of the fourth cycle. The interconnections between the parts have certainly not been exhausted by the preceding discussion.<sup>10</sup> The closing chapter suggests a new beginning, as Anodos asks himself: "must I live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men, whose experience yet runs parallel to that of Fairy Land?" (322). The book as a whole therefore embodies, in broad contours, the cycle embedded four times in it, in microcosm.

Nor is this fourfold "horizontal" structure simply a mechanical organizing device: built into it are some of MacDonald's major thematic pre-occupations which he would clearly have wished readers to reflect upon in shaping their sense of the book's meaning. The repetition in various guises of the pattern of death and rebirth stresses an ongoing process of learning, which, though it draws heavily on non-Christian sources, as Soto has amply developed, nevertheless carries within it a peculiarly Christian dimension of

redemption, though the book contains no overt mention of Christianity at all. The tension between what might be termed the isolate selfhood, and the true self, is woven into this ongoing process. The themes of death and rebirth, and of the nature of the self, are themes which would preoccupy MacDonald through the large proliferation of novels, sermons, and fairy tales over the next nearly four decades, culminating in *Lilith*, where he returned to the metaphysical dream vision mode at the end of his writing career.

### III.

The fourfold structure around which the horizontal dimension of *Phantastes* is organized, is also evident on what I will call the vertical dimension, referring to the different layers within the story, embodied in the four figures which have a sustained, if intermittent presence. These four figures are: the Shadow, the Marble Lady, the Knight, and Anodos himself. Stated somewhat reductively, the Shadow can be taken as an embodiment of the isolate selfhood; the Marble Lady and the Knight as a sort of idealized *anima* and *animus*; Anodos as the shifting perceptual center, encompassing the other three, and, in his story, trying to find the proper balance in them. I will discuss the four in that order.

#### *The Shadow*

At the very end of the first cycle Anodos acquires his Shadow, and at the very beginning of the fourth he loses it. Thus the Shadow is present for the middle part of the book, the second and third cycles.

This is not to say that its absence is absolute: the first cycle builds to its arrival in such a way that it is, at least, latent, if not consolidated and emphasized as such. For example, the Ash, it could be argued, represents a pre-self-conscious manifestation of the Shadow. Simultaneously, the Ash and the Alder together can be seen as a pre-self-conscious manifestation of what the ideal *anima* and *animus*, the Marble Lady and the Knight, become under the influence of the Shadow. In addition, the headnote of Chapter VIII, from Goethe's *Faust Part One*, also suggests, not the creation of something hitherto non-existent, but a breaking apart of one thing from something else already present: "I am a part of the part, which at first was the whole" (92). In the fourth cycle, though Anodos has theoretically "lost" his Shadow, the thought, memory, and fear of it are still present:

But, to my horror, across the valley, and up the height of the opposing mountains, stretched, from my very feet, a hugely expanding shade.

There it lay, long and large, dark and mighty. I turned away with a sick despair; when lo! I beheld the sun just lifting his head above the eastern hill, and the shadow that fell from me, lay only where his beams fell not. I danced for joy. It was only the natural shadow . . .  
(320)

But it is only in the second and third cycles that the Shadow is an identified, visible presence.

The headnote from Goethe suggests division, and the Shadow is the result of a division within Anodos. It appears at the moment when Anodos fully loses his innocence and assumes fully the doubleness of self-consciousness. It is not by chance that the first “evil” act Anodos performs (evil in the sense that it is fully intentional), his violation, suggestively sexual, of the maiden with the globe, occurs in the chapter immediately following the acquisition of the Shadow, and that “the shadow glided around and inwrapt the maiden” (106) before he violates her. The sexual suggestion here further underscores the association of the Shadow with the loss of innocence.

The second and third cycles are themselves “shadowed” on the narrative level. The story of Cosmo, which Anodos reads in the library at the Fairy Palace, parallels and pre-figures the dilemma, the test, which Anodos faces and fails when confronted with the Marble Lady in the Hall of the Dancers. The ballad of Sir Aglovaile, sung to Anodos by the woman of the cottage of the four doors, also parallels the incident, bringing up the memory of the failure and loss that Anodos is trying to flee from in the third cycle:

*Alas, how easily things go wrong!  
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,  
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,  
And life is never the same again.* (235)

As Anodos reaches the final stages of his underground journey, “A grey mist continually gathered behind me. When I looked back towards the past, this mist was the medium through which my eyes had to strain for a vision of what had gone by...” (216). Interestingly, in the first cycle, when the Shadow is latent, or, as it were, incomplete, the only secondary story is that of Percival, which breaks off in the middle, just as the Alder maid is mentioned (21-2); the only secondary story in the fourth cycle is a personal experience of the Knight’s.

But though the Shadow is associated with a divided, double consciousness, it is, itself, fundamentally tyrannical, and leads to a terrifying

singleness of perception, not unlike the Blakean specter. The Shadow's ultimate effect is akin to what Blake called "Single Vision" (Blake 818): we see this at work in Chapter IX where the "lovely fairy child" and his magical toys are transformed under the influence of the Shadow into "a commonplace boy" with a "multiplying glass and a kaleidoscope" (101-2). The Shadow destroys the grass and flowers on which it lies (100); it leads to Anodos's figurative rape of the maiden with the globe; it leads to Anodos's distrust of and parting from the Knight. This tyrannical, disenchanting singleness of vision also breeds conceit and egotism: "I began to be rather vain of my attendant . . . 'I am not one to be fooled by the vanities of the common crowd'" (103). It is this dimension of the Shadow which reaches its terrifying culmination when Anodos, withdrawing into the singleness of extreme self-infatuation at the end of the third cycle, is literally, in Blake's words, "giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood" (495).

The Shadow, then, represents the consciousness divided from its source, which then attempts to tyrannize over its source, leading to a bleak, enslaving singleness of perception, and an inability to believe in one's ideals. It is a negation, as the Ogress suggests: "'The negation of aught else is its affirmation'" (93).

### *The Marble Lady*

The presence of the Marble Lady is perhaps slightly tenuous: she is frozen in stone form in the first and second cycles, immediately flitting away both times as soon as Anodos has woken her. There is no personal interaction between them. In the third cycle she is seen only through the second door of the cottage of the four doors, speaking with the Knight and unaware of the invisible Anodos. The only time in the book where she is actively "onstage" is in the fourth cycle, after the death of Anodos. Yet her presence is a continual factor.

She is brought into being by Anodos's songs in the middle of the first cycle: he "'he woke me from worse than death'" (242), as she later tells the Knight. That the chapter heading is from a version of the Pygmalion myth (Thomas Lovell Beddoes' poem) suggests that she is, in some measure, Anodos's artistic creation. But this clearly does not mean that she is owned by Anodos, in the same sense that MacDonald, as mentioned in the first part of this essay, did not believe that a work of art was contained by what may be the artist's intentions.

Nevertheless, when the Marble Lady flits away out of the cave,

Anodos, as noted above, immediately thinks: “found, freed, lost!” (61). The apparent assumption is that his freeing of the Marble Lady meant that she was, in some measure, his possession. When, a little later, he meets the Alder maid, thinking it is the Marble Lady, his first exclamation is possessive: “It is my white lady!” (70); his first question conveys a sense of having been wronged: “Why did you run away from me when you woke in the cave?” (71). The underwritten sense is that Anodos wants her free only insofar as she will be subject to him—in other words, he does not really want her free. Later, he confesses: “Besides being delighted and proud that *my* songs had called the beautiful creature to life, the same fact caused me to feel a tenderness unspeakable for her, accompanied with a kind of feeling of property in her” (215).

The creation of the Marble Lady, then, becomes for Anodos the chief catalyst in his fall into self-consciousness: in her he sees, not a free living being, but a reflection of himself. As I indicated in the last chapter, the Alder maid plays on this vanity, responding to the above exclamation, “It is your white lady” (70), and to the above question, “That was very unkind of me” (71). The ultimate result two chapters later is Anodos’s division and the acquiring of his Shadow: he wanted a reflection of himself, and he gets it.

It is significant that in the second cycle, in the Hall of Dancers in the Fairy Palace, the Shadow is what separates Anodos from the Marble Lady. But before his songs entirely remove the Shadow, his possessive eroticism causes her once more to flee. In both the first and second cycles, then, the focal point of the tests which Anodos fails, is the Marble Lady.

In the third cycle, again, the Marble Lady is absent save when Anodos sees her on the other side of the second door at the old woman’s cottage. But her absence itself is important: she is the past Anodos is trying to suppress, to flee from, and hence is associated with the third aspect of his consciousness: memory. The problem now is that he is now more trying to force her back into non-being than wanting her free: he wishes “to escape from the nearness of the best beloved” (243). The result is that the object he admires becomes himself, or his self, and his fall in the third cycle is into a spectral isolation.

But in the epiphanic fourth cycle, when he has lost his Shadow, Anodos rather gives himself to the Marble Lady, than expecting any return from her: “I rose into a single large primrose that grew by the edge of the grave, and from the window of its humble, trusting face, looked full in the countenance of the lady . . . The flower caught her eye. She stooped and

plucked it, saying, ‘Oh, you beautiful creature!’ and, lightly kissing it, put it in her bosom” (316).

Anodos shows no urge to either possess or repress here. It is his last interaction with a creature of Fairy Land.

The Marble Lady, then, serves as the focal point of Anodos’s attentions, and the attitude behind those attentions is a clear indicator of where he stands in his progress or education: as long as he wishes to possess or repress, he is bound to fall, and this is at the core of the falls of the first three cycles. As he transcends his self-consciousness in the fourth cycle, losing his Shadow, so he transcends the need to possess, or repress the memory of, the Marble Lady.

### *The Knight*

The Knight is what Anodos says he “would fain become” (304), though it is not until late in the book that he fully realizes this. The Knight’s presence in the book is the inverse of the presence of the Shadow: he is present in the first cycle and the fourth cycle, but largely absent in the second and third, when the Shadow is present.

Again, Anodos is not aware of the Knight’s significance at first: his initial appearance is figural, not actual, in the form of Percival in the book Anodos reads in the cottage between the four trees. The tale of Sir Percival, as noted above, is broken off in the middle, at the point when he is about to encounter the Alder maid, and so Anodos does not receive what would have been a warning concerning the adventure ahead of him.

Likewise, when Anodos first encounters the Knight in fact, he is warned about the Alder maid, but in terms of practical action it is effectively an incomplete warning: he does not take it very seriously: “I have now been often warned; surely I shall be well on my guard; and I am fully resolved not to be ensnared by any beauty, however beautiful. Doubtless, some one man may escape, and I shall be he” (67). We see the first glimmer of self-infatuation here, and the very next thing that happens is that he willingly submits to the deceptions of the Alder maid.<sup>11</sup>

As I have said, it is the adventure with the Alder maid which leads directly to Anodos’s acquiring his Shadow, and the Shadow effectively banishes the Knight at the beginning of the second cycle:

Shame at my neglect of his warning . . . kept me silent; till, on the evening of the second day, some noble words from my companion roused all my heart; and I was at the point of falling on his neck,

and telling him the whole story... when round slid the shadow and inwrap my friend; and I could not trust him. The glory of his brow vanished; the light of his eye grew cold; and I held my peace. (103)  
The Knight is absent for the remainder of the second cycle.

The Knight is absent from the third cycle in much the same way the Marble Lady is: he appears only in Anodos's adventure through the second door of the old woman's cottage in Chapter XIX, and he is repressed in a way similar to the repression of the Marble Lady. As I have pointed out, in the third cycle Anodos rises to action: in a sense, he becomes the Knight. But this is done, in the end, not so much to serve a knightly ideal as to see himself as a knight: "my life had consisted in a vain attempt to behold, if not my ideal in myself, at least myself in my ideal" (289). The cold-eyed knight Anodos sees through his Shadow in Chapter IX is suspiciously like the fierce, scornful, tyrannical knight which is the Shadow's culminating external manifestation.

Only after the disappearance of the Shadow in the fourth cycle does Anodos come back face-to-face with the Knight, to whom he offers himself as squire. Anodos's last act in Fairy Land is done to protect the Knight, and he expects neither renown nor recompense for it.

### *Anodos*

The passage of Anodos through *Phantastes* was charted fairly extensively in the discussion of the four cycles of the book, so not much needs to be detailed here. Suffice it to say, Anodos is the viewpoint character of the book: he is the perceptual center. The significances of the name, repeating through critical studies, have varied between "pathless," "the way up," and "the way back"; Fernando Soto has explored more detailed and specific connexions, both to the cyclic goddess myths underlying the mystery religions of ancient Greece, and to the bio-chemical and bio-electrical theories of Justus von Liebig.<sup>12</sup> There can be little doubt that MacDonald was aware of all of these, and equally little doubt that he would not have seen any one of them as uniquely "correct."

Few commentators have neglected to notice that the adventures Anodos meets through the story are, on one level, outward manifestations of an inward state. In a sense, then, Anodos is the creator, or at least (if you will) the midwife, of the other three figures which follow him through his story (the Pygmalion reference is again relevant here). The Shadow comes out of Anodos, as the headnote to Chapter VIII suggests. I would also suggest that Anodos "loses" his Shadow in the same sense that he "acquires" it: it is a

principle broken off from the “whole,” which, like Blake’s Urizen, attempts to assert a tyrannical power over the whole. We should see, at the end of the story, not so much the loss of the Shadow *per se*, as its reintegration.<sup>13</sup>

The Shadow, then, is not so much “found” and “lost” by Anodos, as it emerges out of and returns back into him. The Marble Lady is also, as we have seen, called into discrete being by Anodos: where she stands in relation to him is indicative of his inner state. The Knight, who is, in the end, identified as an effective counterpart of the Marble Lady, is called into being (out of the words of a book, the intangible) indirectly by the calling into being of the Marble Lady (out of stone, the tangible): the knightly ideal as partner for the ideal woman.

These figures all emerge out of Anodos: they *all* form constituent parts of him. Anodos is the center which holds them together. He is also, however, the outward circumference : for so we must read the penultimate chapter of the book, where Anodos, in death, no longer moves through a story with these figures as characters, but expands and informs the residual elements of that story which no longer, in a sense, includes him: in the epiphany, the linear story has opened out into the broad, mandala-like contours of an apocalyptic vision.

These four principles, the Shadow, the Marble Lady, the Knight, and Anodos, organize the layered, vertical dimension of *Phantastes*. They also inform the horizontal dimension. The nuances of the ways the two interact are far more complex, but the following gives a tentative, streamlined sense of how they work together. Though the Shadow is only latent through the first cycle, it is here that Anodos develops the “self” which becomes manifested in the Shadow at its end: in this sense, the first cycle is most strongly associated with the Shadow. The second cycle, with its pervasive erotic interest, is most strongly associated with the Marble Lady: Anodos’s consciousness of an “other,” and the ultimate loss of it through the wish to possess and dominate over it, forms the matter of the cycle. The third cycle, despite the fact that the Knight is absent, finds its focus on knightly action, and is therefore most strongly associated with the Knight: here Anodos strives to see the Knight as himself, and thence becomes imprisoned by his knightly self-image. The Fourth cycle focuses on the regeneration and transfiguration of Anodos himself.

#### IV.

While not specifying a specific meaning, *per se*, the foregoing does

point to the way MacDonald's major inter-relating thematic preoccupations, death and rebirth, and the nature of the Self, are embedded in the fourfold structure of *Phantastes*. What I have referred to as the "horizontal" dimension of the book, the way the linear narrative is organized, embodies a four times repeated pattern of death and re-birth; the "vertical" dimension of the book embodies a four leveled depiction of the self and its varied emanations as they move along the horizontal.

Together, these form what I have called the "Fourfold Myth of Death and Re-birth."

As I have said, the four part structure seems to me more adequate than the triple structure suggested by John Docherty in "A Note on the Structure and Conclusion of *Phantastes*." The breaking points between the cycles which I have suggested are keyed to the major transition points in the narrative, Anodos's "crisis points" if you will: the acquisition of the Shadow, his effective ejection from the Fairy Palace, the loss of his Shadow, his actual death in Fairy Land.<sup>14</sup> The present discussion suggests a framework much more responsive to the actual nuances of the text, particularly including MacDonald's remarkably intricate web of reflections.

The bulk of the discussion has been a textual analysis, in which, as I have said, references to MacDonald's reading and influences have been kept to a minimum intentionally. I believe the thematic substance of *Phantastes* is suggested by its text on its own terms, and that beginning with the text is a more apt approach to opening this "literary 'black box'" (Soto, "Mirrors" 27) than immediately trying to impose formulations of ideas derived from MacDonald's "sources." This is not to say, of course, that those sources and influences are irrelevant, or that discussion of *Phantastes* in light of them cannot be illuminating, and I want to end here with a brief discussion of what seems to me the nature of MacDonald's relationship to them.

First, MacDonald's reading was, to say the least, wide and heterogenous. He was well read in the expected areas of poetry and fiction, in their varied modes and genres, and of philosophy and theology. He clearly had more than a passing background in Christian and Hebrew apocrypha and esoterica, and in non-Christian sacred traditions. With a background in "natural philosophy," he was also quite conversant in the sciences, and far from resistant to developing scientific theory.<sup>15</sup> Nor were these separate compartments of knowledge or inquiry to MacDonald, but profoundly inter-related, reflecting and augmenting each other in striking ways. Mr. Vane's self description at the beginning of *Lilith* can be taken to carry a notable degree of

applicability to MacDonald: “I was constantly seeing, and on the outlook to see, strange analogies, not only between the facts of different sciences of the same order, or between physical and metaphysical facts, but between physical hypotheses and suggestions glimmering out of the metaphysical dreams into which I was in the habit of falling” (*Lilith* 1).

This breadth and heterogeneity is evident in *Phantastes*, where MacDonald’s reading in fact calls attention to itself through the medium of the headnotes to each chapter—which also do some of the reader’s work as far as identifying possible sources,<sup>16</sup> though they are restricted to primarily poetry and fiction. The headnotes themselves are taken almost exclusively from English and German sources, spanning nearly half a millennium, from Thomas Chester’s mid-fourteenth century Middle English Arthurian romance *Sir Launfal*, to works by the third generation Romantics, William Motherwell and Thomas Lovell Beddoes, and MacDonald’s contemporary Henry Sutton. Poetic extracts are mostly English or Scottish, and include narrative, dramatic, and lyric sources, for the most part either Romantic or from the Elizabethan/Jacobean/Caroline period, and traditional Scots ballads; fictional extracts are mainly German, from the Romantic period or immediately preceding it, and range from the philosophical novels of Novalis and Jean Paul Richter, to the chivalric romances of de la Motte Fouqué. There is one headnote drawn from the biblical Book of Judges, and the few philosophical passages are, barring one taken from Schleiermacher, from Novalis. Of course, some writers significant to MacDonald, whose presence can be detected in *Phantastes*, are not cited anywhere: these include Bunyan, Dante, Edmund Spenser, and E.T.A. Hoffmann. The extra-literary sources explored by Soto are all but absent.<sup>17</sup>

The breadth is sufficient to suggest that, to isolate any one source, or type of source, or group of sources, and set it/them up as a sort of “Golden Key” revealing the bottom line “meaning” of *Phantastes*, is to force the work into a box. MacDonald’s imagination, like William Blake’s three quarters of a century earlier, was remarkably syncretistic, and he rarely engaged in passive borrowing: his “sources” were invariably processed, often well beyond anything that was in any likelihood intended by their authors, and made uniquely MacDonald’s own.

A thorough, systematic study of each of the chapter headnotes, and the passages from Novalis and Phineas Fletcher’s *Purple Island* which introduce the book, and how they interrelate with the thematic substance of *Phantastes*, would be fascinating in its own right. In the present context,

however, I will restrict myself to one example to illustrate something of MacDonald's method of "processing."

Chapter VI, where Anodos briefly meets the Knight for the first time, is warned by him about the Alder maid, and then is immediately deceived by the latter and nearly destroyed as a result, is headed by a passage from de la Motte Fouqué's *Der Zauberring* (twice translated into English as *The Magic Ring*), which MacDonald (presumably) translates: "Ah, let a man beware, when his wishes, fulfilled, rain down upon him, and his happiness is unbounded" (64).<sup>18</sup> The superficial link of the passage to the content of the chapter is obvious: having freed the Marble Lady, Anodos's one wish is to find her, and he believes he has done so when he is waylaid by the Alder maid. This much needs no reference to the passage's context in Fouqué's work. But even on its own terms, the simple application is deceptive, and undershot with clear irony: since Anodos seeks the Marble Lady, and this is not she, his wishes are not, in fact, "fulfilled." But this, in turn, can be seen on another level, also ironic, but darker: in his desire to possess, the true object of his search is in fact, if unconsciously, the Alder maid, and the passage can, in an involved way, be seen to foreshadow the arrival of the Shadow. The passage's significance to MacDonald's text, even without reference to its context in Fouqué's, is complex and can be seen to operate on several levels at once.

But a comparative look at the passage's context in *The Magic Ring* is striking. The passage occurs about a third of the way through Fouqué's work. A vow made to engage in single combat for rights of possession to the titular magic ring by Lady Gabrielle, have led the romance's protagonist, Otto von Trautwangen, to victory and the verge of marriage to Gabrielle. However, during the festivities, the pagan Gerda emerges from the shadows and places on the table a hallucinatory draught used by warriors going into battle, which Otto inadvertently drinks. This brings on a (in effect) psychotic break, during which Otto manages to alienate and drive from his presence virtually everyone, including his intended bride. Otto is left, upon recovery of his wits, bereft, as reflected in the passage which MacDonald uses. The juxtaposition of Gabrielle with Gerda can be seen as a hazy, but unmistakable, figure of the Marble Lady and the Alder maid.<sup>19</sup> But where Fouqué depicts a rather simplistic underlying conflict between noble Christian society and the destructive forces of paganism, the issue of delusion is itself what is of interest to MacDonald. Where Otto can largely be seen as an innocent victim of circumstance—the delusional break is attributable simply to his being

drugged—Anodos is clearly complicit in the creation of the circumstances which lead to his misfortunes: his delusion is largely a willed delusion. The distance from Fouqué to MacDonald here is sufficient that, without the headnote, it is likely that few readers would make the connexion.<sup>20</sup> Yet a look at Fouqué's text suggests an unmistakable echo, the differences illustrating the degree to which MacDonald "processed" his "sources."

Again, a thorough, systematic study, along these lines, of the multi-leveled ways MacDonald's chosen headnotes reflect what is happening in the chapters they are attached to, would be quite illuminating. In the present context, MacDonald's use of Fouqué's *The Magic Ring* is perhaps enough to suggest the complexity of his relationship to his "sources," and why trying to establish meaning in *Phantastes* primarily by way of an outside referent(s) is a mistake. MacDonald's sources were multifarious, but in describing the process by which he made use of them, one could aptly say that he took all of his "sources," a great deal sprung from his own imagination, threw it all in a blender, then poured it out into his own mold.

The fourfold structure I have elaborated at some length here may be seen as one articulation of that mold as pertains to *Phantastes*: it is intrinsic to the text both in terms of structure of event, and in the configuration of characters, and is twice—with the beech tree and with the old woman of the cottage of four doors—embedded in the text in miniature. The notion of a four part structure *per se* certainly does not originate with MacDonald, and there are a wide number of predecessors, varied in their form and nature, of which MacDonald would have been aware. At one extreme, Thomas Aquinas's discussion in *Summa Theologica* of the four categories underlying biblical exegesis—literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical (see Aquinas 16-7)—would certainly have been known to MacDonald, had been embraced by Dante, and a reader might see, without too much straining, some correspondences between the four cycles and the four successive categories. At the other extreme, to the romantic MacDonald, who saw the divine hand in the cycles and patterns of the natural world, something as simple as the pattern of the four seasons (again, embedded in the imagined pattern while Anodos is guarded by the beech tree) could have played a suggestive role, and he knew well, for instance, the eighteenth century Scottish poet James Thomson's four part *The Seasons*. Many further possibilities could be enumerated here, of course, but the point is, not to suggest that MacDonald got the idea from "a" source, but that he more likely saw variations in many sources, processed them (as with Fouqué above), and shaped his own unique

pattern.

#### Endnotes

1. Including the fantasy genre which has grown up in the wake of the Tolkien explosion of the 1960s, to which both *Phantastes* and *Lilith* were attached in the seminal Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series (in 1970 and 1969, respectively) in what were up to that point their most widely distributed editions.
2. Of course, between the two MacDonald had written over two dozen novels in the conventional Victorian three-decker mode, which no doubt effected *Lilith*. I have been teaching a course in Science Fiction and Fantasy for a couple of decades, and while *Lilith* does succeed in engaging a good spread of my students (if simultaneously baffling many of them), *Phantastes*, the one time I included it, got the most emphatic, complete “thumbs down” of any book I ever included in the course. I think the lack of “novelistic” structure was a major culprit in this.
3. These I have noticed in various forms, from misread emphases, to inaccurate depictions of plot sequence. A notable example runs through what were, at the time of my 1990 study (and still are, though the number of shorter essays has grown considerably), the three major critical books on MacDonald, those of Richard Reis, David Robb, and Rolland Hein: the identification of the Knight encountered by Anodos in the early pages of the narrative with Perceval, who Anodos reads about at the cottage he visits prior to his encounter with the Ash Tree. But never in the text is the Knight called Perceval, and in fact the Knight explicitly contradicts the identification when he says to Anodos, “as it befell him, so has it befallen to me” (89). What the text conveys is a fairly transparent example of MacDonald’s reflexive technique; if the Knight is equivocated with Perceval, the reader will not perceive this.
4. Verlyn Flieger, in her “Myth, Mysticism, and Magic: Reading at the Close of *Lilith*,” takes issue with the “assumption... that there is a mythopoeic problem that needs to be solved” at the close of *Lilith*,” and suggests in MacDonald “the capacity to acknowledge mutually contradictory realities without trying to decide between them” (Harriman 44, 42). This idea can be applied to the question of whether there is one “final” shape to the structure of *Phantastes*, or any single template for discovering the work’s meaning. (See n.vi below.)
5. While I found some of the biographical information, and details regarding MacDonald’s reading, useful when I first encountered Wolff’s study some three decades ago, I found it impossible to take much of Wolff’s commentary seriously: to do so seemed then, and now seems, to be entirely predicated on being a thorough-going Freudian oneself, and on this level the book seemed to me to say more about

Wolff than about MacDonald.

6. With regard to *Phantastes* in this light, Greville MacDonald wrote: “Once a lady, well known in the educational world, asked the author of *Phantastes* if he could tell her in a few words what might be its meaning? His reply was to the effect that he had written the book with the sole object of giving her its meaning” (viii).

7. This would include the frequent tendency to attempt to squeeze MacDonald into a standard, orthodox formulation of Protestant Christian doctrine, partly resulting from the fact that many readers from the past half century have come to MacDonald by way of C.S.Lewis.

8. See the relevant passages in “A Description of the Last Judgment” (Blake 604). There are many striking similarities between Blake’s and MacDonald’s ideas on the Imagination. But though there are some very Blakean figures present in *Phantastes*, Alexander Gilchrist’s edition, which made Blake’s work available to the general public for the first time, did not appear until 1863. While MacDonald had read Blake closely by the time he composed *Lilith*, it is highly unlikely that he had any notable familiarity with his work at the writing of *Phantastes* in late 1857.

9. Though actually this is only really applicable to Chapter IX; when Anodos comes to the stream which leads him to the Fairy Palace in Chapter X, the account becomes more distinctly consecutive once again.

10. For instance, I have scarcely touched on the various inset stories, which, briefly, may be seen to reflect key elements of their respective cycles. The story of Perceval is broken off, reflecting the innocent Anodos’s inability to process warnings fully. The solitude loving, bookish Cosmo and his Lady of the Mirror obviously reflects Anodos’s situation in the Fairy Palace. The theme of possession is also at the center of the ballad of Sir Aglovaile, and the spare ballad form with its narrative distance, as well as the graveyard setting, key well to the third cycle. It is perhaps appropriate that the story of the fourth cycle is a personal experience of the Knight’s, and focused on aiding in the transformation of the being of a young girl.

11. It is also worth noting that, in Chapter III, the book containing the story of Percival is propped up by Anodos’s hostess in the window to discourage the Ash, while later it is the Knight who comes between Anodos and the Ash, and hence saves Anodos.

12. In “Chthonic Aspects of MacDonald’s *Phantastes*” and “Mirrors in MacDonald’s *Phantastes*,” respectively.

13. In *Lilith*, MacDonald makes very clear that Lilith and the Great Shadow—Satan, more or less—must ultimately be redeemed.

14. By contrast, Docherty’s suggestions for breaking points are a little murky, “Each beginning with a water adventure” (Docherty 25-6). This would place the

beginning of the second section at the point where Anodos finds the stream which eventually brings him to the Fairy Palace, and the beginning of the third where Anodos comes to the seashore. These are important moments certainly—and, of course, I have noted that water figures early in each of my four cycles —, but both serve in a sense as a kind of balm compensating to some degree for a far more noteworthy crisis which precedes it. I would place the dividing points at the crises. Secondly, the three part structure does not treat the moment of Anodos's imprisonment by his shadow self as a noteworthy point of transition, when, in terms of Anodos's development, it is arguably his major turning point.

15. For instance, the scientific theory of evolution, which reached the general public the year after the publication of *Phantastes* in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, can be easily be detected, though in MacDonald's characteristically transmuted form, in *The Princess and Curdie* and in *Lilith*.

16. Though it does not resolve the not entirely irrelevant questions: did MacDonald begin with the quotations and expand on something embedded in them? Or did he tag on the quotations after having written his text? Was there a more synchronic relationship, which would turn the first two questions into something along the lines of the chicken and the egg? Did it (perhaps most likely) vary from chapter to chapter?

17. Greek myth is only engaged by way of English poetry: the Pygmalion headnote is taken from a poem by Beddoes (and though the myth itself is of presumably Greek origin, its primary articulation is in the Latin of Ovid); allusions to Greek subject matter are from Shelley and the Elizabethan John Lyly. No scientific sources explicitly appear.

18. In the Robert Pearse Gillies translation of 1825, the passage reads: "In the hour of gladness and rejoicing, when all our wishes are fulfilled, and the sunbeams are brightest around us, then heaven grant that we may not... prove overconfident or over merry!" (Fouqué 158). The anonymous translation of 1847 reads: "Ah! Let man take heed to himself when the things he wishes for are rained down upon him, and his heart knoweth no bounds to its joy!" (2Fouqué 117).

19. The headnote to Chapter VI in fact includes two quotations, the second taken from William Motherwell's poem "The Demon Lady": "Thy red lips, like worms,/ Travel over my cheek." The decadent eroticism, absent in Gerda, but quite apparent in the Alder maid, may be seen as a merging of Gerda with Motherwell's "demon lady."

20. Further "hazy" echoes of *The Magic Ring* can be seen, as well: Otto's ideal courtly lady, Gabrielle, ends up in love with another knight, and Otto must let her go. Though Fouqué does not tie this to any flaw in Otto's character, or to the notion

that the knight she ends up with, Sir Folko de Montfaucon, is somehow a better embodiment of knightly ideals than Otto, the circumstances are roughly figured in Anodos, the Marble Lady, and the Knight. Otto's first encounter with his "double" (Fouqué 220-1) seems echoed in Anodos's confrontation with his double, though ultimately Fouqué's has a rather mundane explanation: he is Otto's half brother.

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